

Political Analysis

Volume 17 *Volume XVII* (2015)

Article 6

2015

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Catherine Soliman

Seton Hall University, catherine.soliman@student.shu.edu

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Recommended Citation

Soliman, Catherine (2015) "Do Demographics Trump Party Loyalty?: A Study of Legislative Representation," *Political Analysis*: Vol. 17 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://scholarship.shu.edu/pa/vol17/iss1/6>

Do Demographics Trump Party Loyalty?: A Study of Legislative Representation

Catherine Soliman

Introduction

There is considerable research and data proving that within American voters, certain demographic groups have distinct political behaviors. That is, a person's background, although not the only variable, has a significant effect on how that person votes (Fisher 2014). In fact, Smith (2011, as cited in Fisher 2014, 2) asserts that politics in the United States are especially prone to influence by group identities. One of the main reasons for studying political behavior in the context of demographic groups is the ability to predict the direction of public policy (Fisher 2014, 12). This is more so the case within the United States Congress, because representatives are theoretically the most direct influence on public policy. This paper examines whether demographics have the same impact on congressional behavior as they do on American voters. More specifically, this research analyzes the dynamics of congressional behavior in relation to personal attributes of representatives and in relation to political parties. A distinct feature of the United States Congress is the presence of and domination by political parties. Therefore, are lawmakers bound by party loyalty, or are they able to stray from the party's platform and act primarily based on personal attributes? The answer to the question of whether legislative demographics, or preferences, trump party loyalty is found within a wide range of literature. It appears that party loyalty is *not* outweighed by personal preferences. The majority of the research conducted on congressional behavior makes conclusions regarding the increasing polarization between the two parties in Congress. Since both parties are becoming increasingly polarized, this suggests that the pressures of party leadership on legislators leave little room for beliefs that stray from the party's platform.

Determining which variables affect legislative votes allows for a better understanding of the undercurrents present in Congress. It also allows voters to know the reality of what their votes mean. Candidates may be making campaign promises that are feasibly difficult to execute due to the complexity of congressional lawmaking. Additionally, candidates may be appealing to certain constituencies to win an election, but they answer to party leadership once in office. Although Congress has increasingly seen an rise in the diversity of its members, this paper will focus on gender and race. However, religion will be briefly discussed because it is considered the driving

force behind the increasing polarization of the two parties (Broadway 2004) and is predicted to continue to drive polarization (Fisher 2014,77).

Gender and race provide an effective analysis of representation based on demographics because they are two of the most influential classifications. Income, although a differentiating factor for American voters (Fisher 2014), is not a feature that significantly differentiates members of Congress. Geography is also a demographic that has been found to influence American voters. For example, the South tends to be more conservative than other regions of the country. Those living in urban areas tend to vote for the Democratic Party (Fisher 2014). However, those differences are already accounted for in statewide elections for Senate seats, and district-wide elections for the House of Representatives. Furthermore, a representative is more likely to be given leeway to support policies that are favorable to his/her state or district, as opposed to policies that are favorable to a certain demographic.

Congress is increasingly criticized for being too old (Colby 2013); the average age for Senators of the 113th Congress is 62 years and the average age for House members is 57 years. This is the highest average in recent congressional history (Manning 2014, 2). Ingraham (2014) points out that even though Congress is getting older, so is the American population as a whole. In fact, the distance between the median age and the average age of Senators and House members has actually narrowed. Differences in voting behaviors based on age are categorized into wide ranges. That is, those who are between the ages of 18 years and 30 years tend to be more liberal than middle-aged adults and middle-aged adults tend to be more liberal than those over the age of 60 years. Since the age requirement for House members is 25 years old and 30 years old for Senators, this already excludes the most liberal category of people. In fact, the youngest Representative voted in during the 113th Congress was 29 years old. The youngest Senator was 39 years old (Manning 2014, 2). Although comparing the behavior of lawmakers based on age may be worthwhile, race and gender provide more comprehensive conclusions.

Roll-Call Data

The majority of the research used for this paper relies on the analysis of roll-call data. Roll-call data, as defined by The Library of Congress, is a record of the votes of each member of Congress on specific bills. Other types of votes, which are not recorded, include voice vote or division vote. Roberts (2007) warns against the reliance on roll-call data. He studies the effects of the structure of roll-calling in the United States Congress and focuses on the statistical composition

of the records and how they can alter interpretations of votes. There are many factors driving a representative's vote and roll-call data does not explicate those factors. Roll-call data is sensitive and conclusions drawn from this data can either enrich or overturn a conclusion. There are observations made by Roberts about the different voting behaviors between the two chambers of Congress, which will be elaborated upon in a subsequent section. Throughout congressional history, gaining records of the votes on amendments in the House has been difficult. This is not the case in the Senate (Roberts 2007, 365), an indication of the sophisticated relationships representatives in the House have with their political parties. It appears that the difficulty in understanding roll-call data should lead to caution when conducting further research on congressional voting behavior.

However, VanDoren (1990) explains the difference between using roll-call data to explain the collective policy decisions made by Congress as a whole versus using this type of data to explain the variation in policy positions, or lack thereof, amongst individual members or between parties. The former is problematic (VanDoren 1990). Roll-call data can be used to explain congressional voting behavior on an individual level. It, however, becomes problematic when it is used to explain policy decisions of Congress at large. While individual members' views might remain constant, relative to each other, the decisions of Congress change drastically over time because shifts occur in the distribution of members' views. This distinction by VanDoren (1990, 312) explains the conclusions made by Roberts, and his proposed caution towards roll-call data. Roll-call data is also an appropriate measure because the public pays attention to roll-call votes (Ansolabehere and Jones 2010). In fact, constituents have preferences towards public policy and are aware of how their representative vote on certain bills. How much the roll-call vote of the representative matches the pre-conceived opinion of the constituent is a significant determinant of the representative's approval ratings and reelection. Therefore, voters are aware of the voting behavior of their representatives and hold them accountable (Ansolabehere and Jones 2010, 584). In turn, representatives vote on bills aware of the implications of the votes they cast.

The sponsorship and cosponsorship of bills is also looked at as an indicator of how legislators behave in Congress. Besides roll-call data, the sponsorship and cosponsorship of bills is the only type of data that provides position taking and policy implications (Rocca and Sanchez 2008, 131). Bill sponsorship and cosponsorship in Congress are so important that they directly affect the reelection of lawmakers, the successful passing of legislation, and gaining influence

within Congress. These three results are the main goals of representatives. Even bills that do not pass have an impact on the legislative agenda because they bring attention to areas of public policy (Rocca and Sanchez 2008, 132). Since roll-call votes are not taken for every bill, sponsorship and cosponsorship are a way for lawmakers to ensure that their position is noted. Alternatively, lack of sponsorship and cosponsorship can also ensure that their position is recognized. Although the public may not necessarily be aware of this data, prominent supporters of a bill often turn to the media for coverage. It has also been found that members of Congress that are less influential, such as newly elected members and minorities, disproportionately take part in non-roll-call data activities. These activities include newsletters, press releases, nonlegislative debates, legislative debates, amicus curiae briefs, and bill sponsorship and cosponsorship. (Rocca and Sanchez 2008, 133). This data is especially useful because this paper studies gender and race. Since bill sponsorship and cosponsorship are the only type of data with conclusive information about legislative behavior, as previously mentioned, this paper will use research on bill sponsorship and cosponsorship. Roll-call data can also be limited in explaining the extent to which a member of Congress is committed to a certain issue (Swers 2001). Data analyzing bill sponsorship and cosponsorship, therefore, is an appropriate supplement.

Gender

The number of female legislators in Congress, although increasing, is not representative of the overall American population. In the 111th Congress, 91 female representatives, across both chambers and both parties held office. In the 112th Congress, 93 female representatives held office and in the 113th Congress, 96 female representatives held a position (Ornstein et al. 2013). All three Congresses had 535 voting members, females compromising only 17%. After the 2014 midterm elections, females held 19% of positions in Congress (Manning 2014). Despite this, there have been attempts to conclude that the same voting trends that exist among female voters also exist among female representatives in Congress. Data from Congressional Quarterly conservative coalition support scores show that females' votes were more liberal than men's votes in 1991 and 1992. Other than those two years, votes of female lawmakers differed only slightly from votes of male lawmakers (Vega and Firestone 1995). Perhaps the surge in liberal votes by females during these two years can be attributed to the current events pertaining to women at the time. For example, the decision of the Supreme Court in Planned Parenthood v. Casey upheld the decision in Roe v. Wade in June 1992, but the decision also upheld the restrictions imposed by the state of

Pennsylvania on rights to abortion. In the same year, President George H. W. Bush vetoed a bill that would overturn a law prohibiting abortion counseling at family planning clinics financed by the federal government. An even more relevant event to representation is the “Year of the Woman”. This title is given to the year 1992 due to the election of four females to the Senate; this was unprecedented at the time. Finally, in the 1992 Republican National Convention, Pat Buchanan gave a speech declaring a cultural war and announcing the cultural issues that would later become part of the Republican national platform. Besides widespread discontent with the economy, perhaps this was also part of the reason why George H.W. Bush lost the reelection race in 1993, and why the Democrats gained control of the White House.

Swers (2001) asserts that women are more likely, than men, to sponsor and cosponsor bills on issues such as reproductive health, women’s health, and violence prevention against women. Women also uniquely influence the outcome of legislation because they possess different leadership skills than men, which challenge the institutional norms. For example, female legislators exhibit more cooperative and inclusive leadership behavior, as opposed to the traditional competitive leadership behavior of male legislators (Swers 2001, 177). Female representatives also use their positions on committees to promote the integration of women’s interests into legislation. In the Senate, prior to the 2014 midterm elections, female Senators struggled to maintain the gains they made over the years. Democratic women held the highest-ranking positions in committees overseeing areas such as the budget, small business, agriculture, environment, intelligence, and ethics. Republican women held similar positions on committees supervising energy and aging. These Senators themselves believe that their gender had an impact on the outcomes of deliberations in these committees and throughout the Senate as a whole (Slack 2014).

However, Swers concedes that political party forces are too strong to allow this behavior to continue consistently and enduringly. Swers writes, “moderate Republican women changed their bill sponsorship patterns between the 103rd and 104th Congresses as they increased their sponsorship of social welfare bills and decreased their advocacy of more controversial feminist proposals in order to capitalize on their majority power and avoid antagonizing important party constituencies” (2001, 176). Although female legislators tend to be more focused on policies pertaining to women, which is a result of the demands of their constituencies, they are aware of the consequences of alienating themselves from their parties and from the opposition. Swers

advises that this finding, pointing to the institutional influences on legislators, indicates that political scientists must conduct further research on how the positions of the members of Congress and external political forces change the priorities of lawmakers, regardless of their policy preferences (2001, 176). Palmer and Simon (2010) appear to have heeded this advice by conducting research on the voting records of males and females in the House of Representatives.

By looking at the voting records of House members and categorizing the votes based on districts, Palmer and Simon (2010) show that voting differences between males and females in the House are not a result of gender, but of constituencies. Comparing the voting records of predecessors and successors from the same district controls for the differences in constituencies, and allows for conclusions to be made regarding the different voting behavior of male and female House members. When control over a seat remains within the same party, there is found to be no ideological change. When a change in party occurs within a certain district, even if a woman is the predecessor or successor, no significant ideological change is found. They conclude that “the voting records of consecutive members of Congress that come from a particular district are virtually the same regardless of their gender.” Additionally, female House members represent more districts that are urban, wealthy, and highly educated. Despite this, districts that are more liberal tend to vote for more liberal candidates, whether they are male or female. As previously mentioned, although the American population exhibits a geographic gap (Fisher 2014, 168), trying to prove one exists in Congress would be futile because the voting differences based on geography are also a result of constituencies, not personal preferences. Voting differences based on gender are similar to voting differences based on geography in that they are dependent on constituencies. Since this study only analyzes House votes, the same conclusion cannot necessarily be applied to Senate votes.

Rather than focusing on whether female representatives tend to be more liberal, Frederick (2013) examines whether there are gender differences amongst the two, distinct chambers. The findings show that gender does not influence representatives in Congress when they vote on legislature. This is unlike the American voting population, which exhibits a significant gender gap (Fisher, 2013, 86). Female Republicans in the Senate are the exception. They are more liberal than Republicans in the House and Republicans in the Senate (Frederick, 2013, 15). Within the Republican Party, nearly all females who are at odds with the party’s platform on issues defining the modern feminist movement hold positions in the Senate (Frederick 2013, 16). It is important

to note that within the House Democrats, female representatives tend to vote more to the left than other Democrats. However, this is a result of their liberal constituencies. Once this is accounted for, statistically, their voting behavior is essentially identical to other Democrats in Congress. This study is especially significant because it produces results on gender and legislative behavior in the Senate, which many other studies fail to do. Research in this area has been limited due to the minimal presence of females in the Senate. Only recently has the number of women in the Senate been significant enough to provide sufficient data on their behavior.

Since female representatives tend to be less influential than male representatives, and less influential members of Congress participate more than influential members of Congress in non-roll-call forums (Rocca and Sanchez 2008, 133), the focus here shifts towards sponsorship and cosponsorship of bills in the House of Representatives. Women have been found to sponsor and cosponsor more bills pertaining to women's issues (Swers 2001). However, the content of the bills they sponsor and cosponsor might be less indicative of personal preferences and more indicative of their constituencies or the positions of other members. For example, members who propose a piece of legislation tailor it to ensure its passage. This may force them to alter or abandon personal preferences (Rocca and Sanchez 2008, 134). The number of bills a member of Congress sponsors or cosponsors may have other implications, such as the overall levels of participation of legislators. Since the benefits of sponsoring, and even cosponsoring, a bill are outweighed by the costs for minorities in Congress, including women, it can be presumed that they will sponsor and cosponsor less bills than their nonminority counterparts. There are also limitations on how many bills they can cosponsor because not many representatives share their policy goals, which are geared towards minority constituencies (Rocca and Sanchez 2008, 135). This is not the case for female representatives. In Congresses controlled by the Democratic Party, women sponsor and cosponsor an indistinguishable amount of bills as men. In Republican Congresses, women sponsor and cosponsor more bills than men (Rocca and Sanchez 2008, 146). The pattern differences present between the two parties show that the party dynamics and structures in Congress are too influential to be dismissed, despite the occasional presence of demographic differences. Results that are more likely to be expected were found among racial minorities in Congress.

Race

In Rocca and Sanchez's study (2008), racial minorities consisted of African American and Latino representatives. Overall, African American and Latino members of Congress sponsor and

cosponsor less bills than do their white counterparts. However, bill sponsorship and cosponsorship by racial minorities is dependent upon which party controls Congress. In Congresses controlled by the Democratic Party, minorities sponsor and cosponsor just as many bills as nonminorities. During Republican Congresses, minorities sponsor and cosponsor less bills than nonminorities. This is attributed to minorities' membership to the Democratic Party (Rocca and Sanchez 2008, 145). Since minorities in Congress overwhelmingly belong to the Democratic Party, they are encouraged to sponsor and cosponsor more bills when that party is in power, as opposed to when the opposition is in power. Between the 101st and 108th Congresses, 85% of Latinos and 97% of African Americans were members of the Democratic Party (Rocca and Sanchez 2008, 135). These patterns remain consistent until the 113th Congress (Ornstein et al. 2013). African Americans tend to belong to the Democratic Party and hold offices in the House. In the 113th Congress, there are no African American Republicans in the House and only one African American overall in the Senate. Hispanics also tend to belong to the Democratic Party and hold positions in the House, but there are more Hispanic Republicans than there are African American Republicans in the 113th Congress. There are also more Hispanics in the Senate than there are African Americans. These differences are very minute and do not have significant implications, but they are noteworthy. The argument can then be made that since the Republican Party lacks a significant number of minority members, analyzing the voting behavior of minorities is limited. That is, how can a measurement of the changes in minorities' ideology be taken if there are barely any minorities in the Republican Party? However, a Republican does not need to lean liberal, or a Democrat does not need to lean conservative for changes in ideology to occur. African Americans and Hispanics can be compared to nonminorities in the Democratic Party to establish if they are more liberal. Therefore, departing from the party's platform can occur by moving towards either end of the political spectrum.

An area of public policy that minority members of Congress, especially Latinos, might be more ideologically liberal towards, even within the Republican Party, is immigration. Therefore, legislation regarding immigration will be used to establish whether or not Latino members of Congress stray from their parties' ideologies. In an effort to find common factors by which members of Congress vote on, specific to immigration legislation, Casellas and Leal (2012) analyze the influence of partisanship, constituencies, and the members' characteristics. Like the other literature, an increase in partisanship in the House, when compared to the Senate, is

confirmed. The authors use the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, which received support from Democrats and Republicans, and was signed by Ronald Reagan, as a point of comparison to show how partisan the two parties have become over time. A series of bills and amendments for the House, and another set for the Senate, are analyzed to show the progression in polarization. In the House, partisanship is the only significant factor. In the Senate, similar results are found. Latino populations influenced votes, but not consistently and not across all bills tested (Casellas and Leal 2013, 57-58). Partisanship is the sole constant factor across all the votes and throughout both chambers. Constituencies and the personal attributes of the representatives, including gender, do not have any consistent association with votes (Casellas and Leal 2013, 58).

Therefore, there are no ideological differences within a certain district, regardless of gender (Palmer and Simon 2010) and regardless of a Latino background (Casellas and Leal 2013). However, “while constituency factors play an important part in determining vote choice, the party factor tends to be strong enough that similar districts do not have similar voting records when their members are from opposite parties” (Fisher 2005, 111). For this reason, conclusions made within a certain district cannot be applied to another district, despite similarities in constituencies. While district demographics indicate partisan differences in the House, the same is not true of the relationship between demographics of states and the Senate (Fisher 2005, 11). More importantly, this also points to the powerful effects of party control, even when similar policy positions and chamber differences are accounted for.

Political parties also control committee assignments. Regardless of party membership, Rocca, Sanchez, and Morin (2011) predict that minority lawmakers overall exhibit less congressional mobility; the rate at which they gain leadership positions in committees is slower than nonminority representatives. However, African American representatives, despite being at a disadvantage, gain leadership positions at a faster rate than white representatives do. Factors such as seniority were controlled for and, nevertheless, African American legislators are significantly more likely, than white legislators, to gain leadership positions in subcommittees. However, party control remains in effect because the party leadership determines where representatives hold leadership positions. This is yet another way to ensure regulation of policy agenda. The appearance of congressional mobility among African American representatives is a faulty conclusion. What appears like advancements within committees is actually a result of the types of committees in which African Americans members of Congress tend to serve. That is, African American

representatives tend to hold positions in less prestigious committees. In these types of committees, advancing in leadership positions is more easily done than in committees that are more prestigious. This is due to the high rates of transferring out, which are present in these committees (Rocca, Sanchez, and Morin 2011, 905). Committees that are more prestigious include the Rules, Appropriations, Ways and Means, and Energy and Commerce (Rocca, Sanchez, and Morin 2011, 898). Nonetheless, “cross-pressures associated with congressional leadership can cause minority MCs to temper their behavior, often leading to more moderate behavior” (Rocca, Sanchez, and Morin 2011, 905).

On the contrary, Rocca, Sanchez, and Uscinski (2008) conclude that Latino members of Congress are influenced by their personal attributes when they vote in Congress. This finding is specific to Latino representatives and cannot be applied to all racial minorities in Congress. Additionally, this study is used to prove that the classification of Latinos into one group, at least in Congress, is flawed. The authors “felt it necessary to move beyond the simple comparisons between Latino and non-Latino members of Congress and articulate the factors that explain Latino congressional behavior more specifically” (402). Nevertheless, those personal attributes found to have a significance on voting behavior are level and type of education, gender, nativity, and generation. These characteristics are a result of political socialization, which is a significant determinant of ideology overall. National origin and religion were found not to influence the voting behavior of Latino representatives.

Religion

Religion was not found to influence Latino members of Congress and it is not predicted to influence members of Congress in general. However, it is worth examining since the polarization of the two parties is rooted in religious differences. It was previously mentioned that female representatives voted more liberally, in terms of ideology, than male representatives in the early 1990’s, possibly a result of events occurring at the time. Pat Buchanan’s speech at the Republican National Convention was one of those events. His speech declared a culture war and outlined religious issues, such as abortion, that became part of the Republican platform. In 1972, the Republican platform did not mention religious issues. However, in 1976, the Supreme Court decision of Roe v. Wade sparked the controversy over abortion. Following the decision, the Republican platform began to change, most significantly in 1992, and to include religious issues. When studying the levels of partisanship in the House of Representatives and the Senate, it is

apparent that there is a sharp digression from the moderate middle during the early 1990's in the Senate and more so in the House (Poole 2014). The change in the Republican platform, as well as the Supreme Court decision of Planned Parenthood v. Casey, are likely to be significant contributors to this shift in ideology. Even though the number of people who regularly attend religious services have decreased, religion is still a prominent part of political debates. This is, in part, due to the shift in conservative ideology among those who do regularly attend religious services (Fisher 2013, 76).

Partisanship

A significant number of studies support the conclusion that party control and polarization account for the most influential factors on the behavior of representatives in Congress (Rocca and Sanchez 2008, Swers 2001, Casellas and Leal 2012, Frederick 2009, and Rocca, Sanchez, and Morin 2011). Female Republicans in Congress were once found to be more liberal than their male counterparts (Vega and Firestone 1995). This has been shown to be especially true in the Senate (Frederick 2013). However, Frederick (2009, as cited in Frederick 2013, 3) emphasizes that those differences have diminished in the most recent Congresses due to “a polarized institution where Republican women feel substantial pressure to compile more conservative records in line with the national party platform.” Partisanship and an increasingly polarized Congress prevent representatives from voting based on personal preferences. Party loyalty has been reinforced through institutional practices.

The increasing polarization in party realignment is traced back to the “death of moderates” (Beinart 2010). In the 1960's and 1970's, the two major parties realigned, as Southern Democrats shifted to the Republican Party and as Northern liberals moved to the Democratic Party. The shift in the two parties brought an end to the times when members of Congress were capable of being cross-pressured by the opposition. Beinart also identifies the increase in filibusters as an explanation for the polarity in government, more specifically in the Senate. The filibuster was first used as a weapon when Bill Clinton was president and it forced the Senate Democrats to obtain 60 votes, rather than the majority vote, to pass a bill. Now, the filibuster is a threat to both parties. However, political parties see no interest in changing these patterns; in fact, they gain power from it.

Some researchers find that the reasons for the increased polarization in Congress cannot be applied to all policies or political issues. Jochim and Jones analyze the House of Representative

votes on eighteen issues ranging from 1965 to 2004. This is done in an effort to examine the level of polarization on an issue-by-issue basis. By doing so, the authors are able to examine how and why polarization has taken place. They, in fact, find that polarization between parties has happened on an issue-by-issue basis, rather than all at once. Of particular significance is the finding that issues have been altered to be ideological and one-dimensional rather than pluralistic and multidimensional. This transformation occurs because of three reasons. First, parties intentionally influence this change. Issues become based on left-right ideologies because it is in the interest of parties to have them that way. Second, legislative procedures have become centered around party leadership in Congress. Increasing the polarization of issues further strengthens the control of party leadership. Finally, the solutions to issues are addressed through government programs. Increasingly, certain programs have become more aligned with certain ideologies (Jochim and Jones 2012). Although policies do not initially have polar opposite solutions, parties intentionally change the dimensionality of issues, showing the dominant role parties play in congressional decisions. Additionally, differences between groups are a weakness for political parties. Those differences, between groups and regions, are only partially consolidated by parties (Fisher 2005, 103). For this reason, political parties see the need to propose solutions to problems through two opposing forms of public policy.

Effects of Partisanship

Representatives suffer consequences for being too loyal to their parties (Carson, Koger, Lebo, and Young 2010). In fact, voters punish congressional representatives for being too partisan when compared to being too ideological. This conclusion assumes that voters form opinions about policies, are aware of their representatives' opinions, and use that information to hold them accountable. Sides and Vavreck (2013) argue that voters are not aware of a candidate's position and do not form their own positions. Rather, they change their views to fit those of a certain candidate (228). However, as previously mentioned, constituents have preconceived opinions of public policy and they are also aware of the positions of their representative. Additionally, constituents hold their representatives accountable based on how much the roll-call vote of the representative matches the policy preferences of the constituents (Ansolabehere and Jones 2010). In addition to analyzing data from 1956-2004, Carson et al. designed an experiment in which participants were provided with information about fictional members of the House of Representatives. The likelihood to support a certain representative is measured based on this initial

information. Then, the participants were given a list of ten positions on which the representative can vote based on ideology or partisanship. Representatives were created so that one was partisan-characterized and one was ideology-characterized. The results clearly show that an incumbent who is known to have consistently supported one particular party suffers, since voters stop supporting him or her (Carson et al. 2010, 605). Although it appears from this study that representatives are negatively impacted by their loyalties to their parties, their congressional voting behavior remains the same.

Party loyalty is so influential that representatives in Congress continue to vote along party lines even though they risk losing reelection. However, representatives would also risk losing reelection if they did not adhere to the wishes of their parties. Party leaders have the ability to influence a representative's career by choosing which committee he/she sits on. Representatives use their positions in committees to the advantage of their districts and, therefore, to strengthen their chances of reelection. When there are conflicts between the demands of the party and the demands of the constituency, it is often assumed that the demands of the constituency are often more influential. Yet, party membership is the strongest determinant of legislative behavior (Fisher 2005, 103). Additionally, analyzing the effects that constituencies have on the voting behavior of representatives shows that party membership is more influential, especially in the context of immigration policy (Casellas and Leal 2013).

Jacobson finds that the American population is reinforcing polarization and that the polarization gap in both chambers of the 112th Congress is the widest it has ever been (Jacobson 2013, 690). The reason for the increasing polarization is the growing consistency amongst American voters and the occurrence of party realignment during the 1960's (Jacobson 2013, 691). The relationship between ideology and voting became stronger as party loyalty among congressional voters increased (Jacobson 2013, 694). As these patterns continued, congressional members of the opposing party shared fewer voters with the party of the residing president. This gave them little to no reason to cooperate with him (Jacobson 2013, 700). Polarization is also reinforced through divided government. The structure of the House's districts favors the Republican Party during elections. Democrats, who win a significant amount of minorities' votes, have a concentration of supporters in urban areas. However, Republicans have supporters who are more widespread across different districts. As a result, Republicans are able to gain the support of electorates across district lines (Jacobson 2013, 702). Following the 2014 midterm elections, this

ideological gap will continue to widen. The breakdown of each chamber shows significant findings.

Polarization is aggravated by conservative extremity. In both the House and Senate, members of the Democratic Party were found to remain closer to the moderate line, on the “10-90% Ranges of Parties on the Liberal-Conservative Dimension.” Members of the Republican Party have been increasingly drifting towards the extreme conservative end of the political spectrum (Poole 2014). In fact, polarization has a conservative bias (McCarty 2007). This is especially true of fiscal policy. McCarty writes, “We can see that polarization has a large, depressing effect on the level of the real minimum wage. In fact, the difference between the predicted wage at minimum level of polarization and the maximum level is about \$5.” Looking at economic policies as a whole shows that Congress has not been able to control the deficit because the process of balancing the budget has become solely focused on the budget. Jones and Walter (2008) assert that fiscal prudence must be carried out by taking into consideration the budget as well as the deficit. Furthermore, federal laws, such as the Budget Enforcement Act, focus on the budget and not revenue. The Republican Party’s policies tend to be focused on balancing the budget and opposed to raising taxes. As a result, the sources of revenue are diminished. This approach has become ingrained in the Republican Party’s ideology and has affected Congress, as a whole, in its approach to economic policies.

Partisanship in the House v. Partisanship in the Senate

Within Congress, the two chambers are distinguishable in regards to partisanship (Frederick 2013, Jacobson 2013, Casellas and Leal 2013, Roberts 2007, Fisher 2005). For example, in the context of the federal budget, pressures from constituencies are substantially higher in the House than in the Senate (Fisher 2005, 109). As previously mentioned, Republican women who take a position that is in opposition to the party’s platform almost always hold positions in the Senate (Frederick 2013). This phenomenon is explained by the extreme polarization and firm control of the majority party, especially in the House. The fact that female Republicans are more liberal in the Senate shows that there is more leniency in the Senate. The House has become exceedingly partisan, especially within the last few decades, as the majority party changed the House rules to limit the impact of its individual members (Frederick 2013, 3). Furthermore, “The nature of the institution suggests that the Senate consistently should be more moderate ideologically than the House” (Fisher 2005, 110). This is the case; the ideological gap is wider in

the House than in the Senate (Jacobson 2013). Between the 93rd Congress and the 112th Congress, the ideological gap in the Senate increased from .568 to .845. In the House, it widened from .527 to 1.070. In both chambers, the “death of the moderates” begins taking shape in the 1970’s. More so in the House, but also in the Senate, there is a sharp digression from the moderate middle during the early 1990’s (Poole 2014). Female representatives were also found to be more liberal than their male counterparts were in 1991 and 1992 (Vega and Firestone 1995). There were also several events that took place during this time that might have attributed to this deviation towards ideological polarization, such as the decision of Planned Parenthood v. Casey, as previously mentioned. As expected, Senators, between the 1930’s and 1970’s often deviated into the side of the political spectrum opposite that of their political party. Finally, in both chambers, but more so in the House, Democrats have maintained a relatively stable political ideology. However, Republicans have shown a sharp conservative incline, especially in the House. Other chamber differences are present in the context of immigration bills (Casellas and Leal 212). First, representatives in the House, more than the Senate, were influenced by Latino populations. This can be explained by the drawing of district lines, which are often drawn around pre-existing Latino populations. The economic dynamics of constituencies might have influenced Senators but they did not influence House members. Finally, House members, and not Senators, might have been influenced by re-election concerns, showing that House members are more pressured by institutional dynamics.

Should Representatives Vote Based on Personal Attributes?

Given the finding that demographics, such as gender and race, do not influence representatives more than their party membership does, how *should* representatives vote? There are two sides to this argument. First, it can be argued that voters make electoral decisions based on the attributes of a candidate. Knowing that they are from the same demographic groups as a certain candidate leads them to believe that that candidate will have the same policy preferences as them. Congress is already not representative of the entire American population. While 51% of the American population is female, only 17% of the House and 17% of the Senate, in 2012, was female (Noren 2012). Likewise, while only 64% of the American population is white, an overwhelming percent (82% in the House and 96% in the Senate) was white in 2012. For representatives to not adhere to their own personal attributes, which constituents depend on when making voting choices, and be influenced by party loyalty, would aggravate the existing lack of

representation. The other side of the argument is that Congress passes laws for America as a whole. Americans get to choose between two parties; the dramatic overturns during the midterm elections, especially the 2014 midterm elections, show that the party system works. Additionally, it has been found that the higher the number of female representatives in Congressional committees, the higher the occurrences of aggressive behavior by male representatives (Swers 2001, 177). This shows that representatives are threatened by a departure from the norms of the institution and it discourages members of Congress from taking legislative decisions that stray from the traditional standard. This traditional standard has been established to be a strict adherence to the two-party system.

In an analytic study of congressional voting behavior, Meagher and Vander Wielen examine three congressional decision-making models and their effects on legislative voting. The authors conduct their analysis of voting behavior by using policy relating to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), with an effort to detail the congressional influence over bureaucratic institutions. The authors make the case that they are justified in choosing the EPA because there is no reason to believe that members of Congress use different decision-making demeanor for the EPA in comparison to other bureaucratic agencies (Meagher and Vander Wielen 2012, 673). There are three congressional decision-making models: the preference model, the simple party model, and the asymmetric model. The first model suggests that representatives have policy preferences before being elected and they vote solely based on those preferences. The simple party model proposes that representatives vote exclusively in agreement with their party's position. The last model offers a more diversified explanation: members of Congress are permitted to vote based on their preferences, but the majority party has unchallenged control of the agenda. The asymmetric model is a hybrid of the preference model and the simple party model (Meagher and Vander Wielen 2012, 670-671). The data supports the asymmetric model, showing that preference does not outweigh voting behavior in the House (Meagher and Vander Wielen 2012, 679). Rather than adhering solely to personal preferences, or solely to party demands, representatives make legislative decisions based on both. Therefore, the voting behaviors that are present among American voters are not present among American representatives, as they vote on legislation, because of the polarized nature of the two-party system.

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